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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/02/2018
TAGS: PGOV PREL ASEC PHUM ZI
SUBJECT: ZANU-PF AND MDC DISCUSS GNU

Classified By: Ambassador James D. McGee for reason 1.4 (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Welshman Ncube briefed polecon chief June 11 on talks between ZANU-PF and the MDC directed at a government of national unity (GNU). According to Ncube, the talks have the blessing of both Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe and MDC president Morgan Tsvangirai and envisage a "Kenyan" solution with Mugabe retaining a ceremonial role as president and Tsvangirai assuming the position of prime minister. The big question is whether each individual will make the compromises necessary to achieve an agreement. A first round of talks took place on May 30. A second round is taking place June 11 and June 12. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Ncube said that the South Africans had been pressing for some time for a continuation of the SADC talks to resolve the current crisis. Tsvangirai refused to participate as long as South African president Thabo Mbeki was in charge. He did indicate he would allow South Africa to mediate talks that had as their focus a meeting between Mugabe and himself.

¶3. (C) According to Ncube, an initial meeting took place on May 30 in South Africa, ostensibly to discuss a one-on-one meeting. Participants were ZANU-PF negotiators Patrick Chinamasa and Nicholas Goche and MDC negotiators Tendai Biti and Elton Mangoma. (NOTE: Ncube had previously negotiated with Biti in the pre-election SADC talks. Since the current talks were to focus on a Mugabe-Tsvangirai meeting, Tsvangirai wanted Ncube replaced with Mangoma, the MDC treasurer. Ncube said Biti and the South African mediators continue to brief him on developments. END NOTE.) Mediators were Sydney Mufamadi, Frank Chikane, and Mojanku Gumbi.

¶4. (C) Ncube stated that Mugabe took the position, through his representatives, that he wanted an agenda before he would meet with Tsvangirai. The meeting therefore expanded into a discussion of the run-off election, violence, and implementation of the pre-election SADC agreement. It was

agreed to have a second round of talks; ZANU-PF wanted concrete proposals from the MDC for a government of national unity in the event there was no run-off. The second round is taking place June 11 and June 12 in South Africa. Ncube commented that this round was to have take place in Harare, but the ZANU-PF negotiators told Biti they could not guarantee he would not be arrested upon returning to Harare. (NOTE: Biti has been absent from Zimbabwe since shortly after the March 29 elections; there is a warrant for his arrest for proclaiming that the MDC had won before official results were announced. END NOTE.)

15. (C) According to Ncube, Mugabe in the past had believed that Tsvangirai, in a GNU, should have the position of vice-president, thereby limiting his power. This was understandably unacceptable to Tsvangirai. Ncube told us Goche and Chinamasa as well as other ZANU-PF insiders, had told him that Mugabe might now be agreeable to a "Kenyan" type solution, whereby Mugabe would become a ceremonial president and Tsvangirai would assume the position--under a new or amended constitution--of prime minister.

16. (C) Ncube noted that an agreement would require flexibility on the part of both Mugabe and Tsvangirai. He stated less than two weeks ago Mugabe had told the South Africans he hated Tsvangirai with a passion. Tsvangirai, on the other hand, wanted nothing to do with a government that included Mugabe. Yet, opined Ncube, a GNU that included both was the only way forward. Mugabe was at a dead end with a collapsed economy and an inoperable government. Tsvangirai

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had to realize that even if he won the run-off election Mugabe and ZANU-PF might well fail to recognize the result. In fact, they might not even count the results. Both men now had to make compromises. (NOTE: Ncube commented that an election was impossible under current circumstances. In his home base of Matabeleland, it was impossible to hold rallies or organize. Those who wore MDC T-shirts or campaigned in any way for the MDC were harassed, intimidated, and worse. END NOTE.)

17. (C) We asked Ncube how the MDC could join forces with a party that has been responsible for endless brutality against its officials and supporters. Ncube responded that a GNU might be akin to a pact with the devil and could be seen as rewarding ZANU-PF for its perverse behavior. But it might be the only way to stop the violence.

18. (C) Turning to the international community, Ncube thought it had no role to play in GNU talks. This was a matter to be resolved by Zimbabweans themselves. More complicated would be the role of the U.S. and others in the event of a GNU. Ncube realized that the international community would be loathe to deal with a government that included Mugabe. Nevertheless, argued Ncube, a GNU without western support would be doomed to failure.

COMMENT

19. (C) Tsvangirai has stated publicly and privately he wants no part of a GNU in which Mugabe retains power. He continues to campaign for the run-off election. (Tomorrow he starts a tour of Zimbabwe in a large bus imported from South Africa.) But it is increasingly obvious that ZANU-PF will not allow itself to lose the election. If the current reign of violence does not result in additional ZANU-PF voters and fewer MDC voters for the June 27 election than in the March 29 election, then ZANU-PF is prepared to rig the results at the polling stations, or perhaps--taking a page from Kenya--simply announce it has won. Ncube may in fact be right that the only solution is a GNU--whether formed before or after the election. ZANU-PF knows it cannot govern with an opposition that enjoys a parliamentary majority. And the

MDC knows it is unlikely it can gain the presidency in the June 27 election and will have no alternative to negotiation if it loses.

¶10. (C) Given the tortured history of ZANU-PF-MDC negotiations, we have no idea at this point whether a GNU agreement is probable or even possible at this time. We suspect that ZANU-PF is negotiating now as a salve to SADC and Mbeki, and would prefer to engage in serious negotiations after it has won the election and feels that it is dealing from a position of even greater strength.

¶11. (C) At this time, we don't believe there is anything we can do, either privately or publicly, to influence the GNU negotiating process. What we can and should do is continue to expose the violence and help in any way possible, through the support of civil society and observers, to improve conditions for the election, assuming that it will take place.

McGee